

Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

Take a Heavenly Fall Hike On Devil's Backbone Trail at Warriors' Path State Park

By Fran Wallas

The Devil's Backbone Trail at Warriors' Path State Park in Kingsport offers a fall hike that will engage your senses with the sounds of the forest and the sights of ridges and a river.

After you hike about 20 feet along the golf cart path, there is a large wooden trailhead sign tucked in the woods on your right. Devil's Backbone Trail is a strenuous 2.5-mile linear trail with steep ups and downs.

The trail is marked with light blue blazes. As you begin climbing through the shady hardwood forest with brightly colored oaks and maples, watch for deer and listen for birds. You may also hear the sounds of boats on the lake below. Although you cross the edge of the golf course several times, you quickly reenter the quiet of the forest. In a half-mile, you come to the Lone Cedar Overlook. Although cedars once covered much of this limestone ridge, the hardwoods have shaded out the cedars and replaced them. Keep climbing to the top of the ridge and Rocky Point Overlook. What a wonderful place! There is a beautiful view of the South Fork of the Holston River and the colorful ridges on the other side. If you only get this far, the hike is worth it.

The trail starts down a series of turns until you get to the water. The

trail then follows the edge of the lake. A tree bearing two blazes indicates that you need to turn left at the rock pile. Follow the trail until it ends at a T-junction. You can hear Fall Creek.

Turn left and hike along the creek. This is a great place for a short detour to cool your feet in the creek and listen to the soothing cascades. Stay on the main trail and ignore any side trails. In about a quarter of a mile, you will see Horsetails (Scouring Rush) growing along the creek and a bridge. When you cross the bridge, the trail climbs up away from the creek.

At the end of Devil's Backbone, you come to the Fall Creek Loop Trail. You can turn around at this point or take the 1.5-mile gently rolling trail. The loop goes through a beginning forest. The cedars are still hanging on, but the hardwoods are moving in. There is still a lingering feel of meadow and wildflowers enjoy the added sunshine.

When you climb up the ridge on your return, notice the interesting limestone vertebrae of the Devil's Backbone. You can tell your fellow hikers that you are stopping to notice the



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Maidenhair Fern among autumn leaves along the trail at Warriors' Path State Park in Kingsport. Below: Patrick Henry Lake at Warriors' Path State Park in Kingsport.

ferns, wildflowers, rocks and large White Oaks. You won't have to admit that you are just trying to make it to the top of the ridge. Rocky Point Overlook will be perfect for that last drink and snack before hiking back to your car.

Directions

Take Highway 81 to exit 59 State Route 36. Go north 1.4 miles to Hemlock Road. Turn right and continue 1.6 miles to the park entrance. Trail maps are available at the park office, campground and marina. After picking up a trail map, drive out of the park and turn right on Fall Creek Road. There is a golf cart crossing just after the Holston River Bridge. Park your car along the wide shoulder on the right side of the road just past the crosswalk.

Warriors' Path State Park



(Fran Wallas is an avid hiker. She works as an attorney for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation in Nashville. You can read about her other Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks at www.tn.gov/environment/greathikes.)



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